

# CORRESPONDENCE

*The Eugenics Society is not responsible for opinions expressed by correspondents*

## Designation of Uncommon Families

*To the Editor, Eugenics Review.*

SIR,—Commenting on your own Notes on this subject you write: "such designations might, in this country, evoke more ridicule than commendation." One would surely hope that this would be so in any country. Designations of the kind intended would be without any scientific validity. To mention only a few of the difficulties which would arise: Where would the "family" begin and end, and where would its limits be drawn? And how would it be named? Rather more genetic material is passed from one generation to the next by women than by men; they usually change their names before taking their place in the process of transmission, and then have more important things to do than to attain distinction in their own persons. What is to prevent the moron descendant of distinguished ancestors from priding himself on his membership of a "designated family," and so bringing the system, and eugenics with it, into public contempt?

"Families," in the sense called for by the proposed "designation," are not entities at all. In genetics, as in other fields of human appraisal, the individual has to stand on his own feet; if he has inherited uncommon abilities from his progenitors, it is up to him to prove it. The dull and backward son of distinguished parents is no better genetically than his equivalent from a family of artisans, or if he is, this is yet to be proved. The distinguished son of distinguished parents is, genetically, probably a less valuable prospect than a man of equal achievement from an undistinguished family—for the latter will have had further to go. In its hereditary nobility the country already has more than its share of "designated" families, and very second-rate stuff they are.

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## Home Background and Selection for Secondary Education.\*

*To the Editor, Eugenics Review.*

SIR,—I was privileged to be present as a guest at the meeting of the Eugenics Society on May 23rd, 1956, when Dr. F. M. Martin gave a most interesting talk on Home Background and Selection for Secondary Education. I was struck by the importance which seems to be attached to the Grammar

School, as the highest educational attainment, in comparison with the technical and modern schools. It does not perhaps come to the notice of the education authorities that this attitude gives rise to a rather undesirable form of snobbery. As an illustration of this I will quote the case of a boy who failed through bad spelling to pass into the Grammar School and was sent to the Technical School. As his wish was to become an engineer this was of course the best thing that could have happened to him. After a year he showed so much intelligence and worked so well that he was offered a place in the Grammar School. He was very happy where he was and was receiving the training he needed for the work he wanted to do, so the offer was wisely refused: but many parents would have jumped at the chance of wiping out the stigma which attached to the original failure and the boy's future would have become uncertain.

Would it not be better to differentiate in the first place between boys seeking "white collar" professions and those who prefer technical or scientific subjects, and not to let them all try for the Grammar School and then send the failures to the other secondary schools?

SYBIL MAXWELL.

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*To the Editor, Eugenics Review.*

SIR.—Mrs. Maxwell's letter raises an interesting point. What Mrs. Maxwell in fact deplores is an absence of that parity of esteem, as between different types of secondary school, which is written into the Education Act and which is, in practice, unlikely to develop as long as parents have reason to believe that only a grammar school education will open the doors to a socially desirable job. The educational snobbery which Mrs. Maxwell condemns is no more than a reflection of our wider social snobbery.

The suggestion that allocation to schools should be based on the child's occupational preferences is an interesting one, but against it must be set the fact that only a small minority of children will have developed stable and realistic ambitions by the age of eleven. My own conviction is that we need a sustained effort—which so far has been lacking in many areas—to raise the levels of the technical and secondary modern schools, a high degree of flexibility and ease of transfer, and a readiness to experiment with methods of organizing secondary education other than the conventionally tripartite.

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\* It is regretted that Dr. Martin's paper under this title could not be included in this issue of the REVIEW. It will be published in our January number—EDITOR.